

Francis Brown, Fidel Castro's inopportune American



Francis Brown - U.S. passport photo

Francis Brown, a 68 year-old U.S. citizen, died April 27, 1978 at the General Hospital of Guantanamo, Cuba, after receiving an injection his daughter believes was meant to kill him. That same day, his daughter's unborn child was reportedly murdered at a Havana Hospital by doctors under the control of or employed by Cuba's State Security.

Francis was a U.S. World War II veteran who had been stationed by the U.S. Navy at its the naval base at Guantanamo and had then stayed on as a civilian. When the revolutionary regime came to power in January 1959, he was working as a diver at the base and lived in the Cuban city of Guantánamo with a local woman and their daughter, Miriam. According to Miriam, when hostilities between the Castro regime and the U.S. government escalated, Brown was alerted of a plot to kill him by the designated killer; purportedly the Castro brothers planned to blame the U.S. government for Brown's death to provoke an open confrontation. To avoid being used as a pawn, Brown resigned his job at the base and decided to stay in Cuba until he could get his daughter out.

The Cuban government, seeking an excuse to imprison him, accused Francis of kidnapping his own daughter. At the time, Miriam was six and had been living with her father and a loving stepmother (her parents had separated), as her mother did not want her. Brown was released two months later after many Guantaánamo residents protested, including loyal regime opponents—they knew the family well and realized the charge was false. But Miriam was forced to go live with her mother, who refused permission for her to emigrate with her father, apparently under government pressure. Brown was allowed to visit his daughter only once a month and always with two Ministry of the Interior guards escorting him and watching his every move.

Francis refused to leave for the U.S. without his daughter. His circumstances made him a serious public relations' problem for the Castro regime, particularly because he was African-American and Cuba was heavily invested in racially-minded propaganda and other efforts worldwide. In March 1977, shortly after taking office, President Jimmy Carter ordered the normalization of U.S. relations with Cuba, a move welcomed by the Castro government that led to opening reciprocal Interests' Sections and allowing exiles to travel back to Cuba. Miriam believes this prompted the regime to decide to get rid of "the American" once and for all. State Security agents accosted Francis with threats and he immediately developed physical discomforts, apparently from elevated blood pressure. He went to the emergency room at the Guantánamo General Hospital seeking medical attention. Under the watch of State Security officers, he was given an injection that caused him to foam at the mouth almost immediately and die soon thereafter. He was reportedly buried at the Guantánamo cemetery, but years later, when the family went to exhume the body, his remains were nowhere to be found.



Miriam Brown, Francis Brown's daughter, 2008

On the day of Francis's death, Miriam, who lived in Havana, alleges that the full-term baby boy she was carrying was deliberately killed and that she was almost killed by doctors at a Havana hospital. She believes Cuba's State Security wanted to prevent her from attending her father's funeral and creating a scene. After her father's death,

she endured years of harassment, threats, and captivity. Once she reached adulthood and was able to emigrate without maternal permission, the Cuban government refused her the authorization to leave the country. Finally, in late 2009, after threatening a hunger strike, she was allowed to leave for the U.S. and has since settled in the U.S. as a political asylee. Even in U.S. soil, she reports continued threats, attacks, and persecution from agents she believed are orchestrated by Cuba.

Sources: Testimony of daughter, by telephone from Indiana, USA, January 24, 2014. Juan González Febles, "La Negra Historia de La Negra Miriam," Asociación Pro Libertad De Prensa, 9 de octubre de 2008. Caridad Cristina Álvarez, "Acosa Seguridad del Estado a hija de ciudadano estadounidense," La Habana Grupo Decoro, 7 agosto 2002 (www.CubaNet.org). Press Alert, "Jimmy Carter directive on normalizing Cuba relations, National Security Archive, May 15, 2002.

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